

Fact Sheet for People with Diabetes: Understanding Dilated Retinal Eye Exams

Testing for diabetic eye disease

People with diabetes are at special risk for serious eye problems, such as poor sight and blindness.

Approximately 80% of people who have diabetes for more than 15 years have some eye damage. Many of the problems are preventable.

I don't notice any vision changes, should I still be concerned?

In many cases, diabetic eye disease does not cause any changes in vision until damage is very serious. To find eye disease before the damage is very serious and sight is lost, eyes must be examined by a healthcare professional regularly.

How often should I have my eyes checked?

You should have your eyes checked by an eye-care specialist once a year. During the exam, your eyes should be dilated and the specialist should do a very thorough exam.

Does Medicare cover eye exams?

For diabetics, Medicare covers the cost of an annual dilated retinal exam by a licensed and registered optometrist or ophthalmologist.

Is there anyone else who should examine my eyes?

Your family doctor may also want to examine your eyes at office visits. If problems are found, he/she will refer you to an ophthalmologist for further examination and treatment.

When should I call my doctor?

Call your doctor right away if you have any eye problems or changes in vision, such as haziness, partially blocked sight, dark spots, flashing lights or difficulty seeing at night.

How will an ophthalmologist treat my problem?

Treatment may not be necessary, but you will be examined every year to make sure the disease does not worsen. In some cases, vision loss and blindness can be prevented with the use of laser surgery. Laser surgery and other treatments work best when eye problems are found early.

How can I prevent vision problems?

Good blood sugar control can help prevent vision problems. Try to keep blood sugars as close to normal as possible. Your physician can tell you what "normal levels" are for you.

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